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Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report provides an update to the Economic and Social Council on the perspectives and developments in regional cooperation and the work of the regional commissions in relevant areas since the Council's substantive session of 2005, pursuant to the guidance contained in annex III to Council resolution 1998/46 of 31 July 1998. The 2005 World Summit, which closely engaged the commissions, served as a main reference point for the report. The commissions provided inputs for the Summit's preparation and participated in the follow-up to its outcome as part of the Organization-wide response. In section I, the report reviews the regional dimension of global issues and the global dimension of regional issues as contained in the report of the executive secretaries, which is submitted to the Council in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1823 (XVII) and Council resolution 1817 (LV). That section also provides an update on the role and contributions of the commissions to support the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, and reflects developments regarding effective linkages among the regional commissions and their institutional partners at the country, regional and global levels. In line with Council decision 2004/323 of 11 November 2004, providing for a dialogue between the executive secretaries of the regional commissions and the Council, and to facilitate the dialogue as a continuation of discussions in the high-level segment of the substantive session of the Council, an analytical presentation of the regional dimension of creating an environment conducive to generating full and productive employment and decent work for all, and its impact on sustainable development, is submitted in section II.

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The resolutions and decisions adopted by the regional commissions during the period under review that require action by the Council or are brought to its attention will be contained in an addendum to the present report (E/2006/15/Add.1).

The summaries of the economic surveys and trends in the five regions are provided to the Council for its consideration. The annual reports of the regional commissions are made available as background information as they address matters relevant to the issues covered in the present report and its addendum. They are issued as supplements to the *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council*.

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I. Report of the executive secretaries and developments in selected areas of regional and interregional cooperation

A. Report of the executive secretaries

1. The meetings of the executive secretaries of the regional commissions held during the period under review focused mainly on the 2005 World Summit and its Outcome (General Assembly resolution 60/1), progress towards the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, the World Summit on the Information Society and the efforts of the regional commissions to mainstream the regional dimension in the overall work of the United Nations in the economic and social sectors. In the view of the executive secretaries, the Summit Outcome underlines the need to bring the commissions' analytical and normative work and the regional dimension of development to bear further on development work at the country level through a process of sequencing actions. This requires strengthened coordination among the United Nations country teams, led by the resident coordinators, and the regional commissions. Such a move has to be complemented by furthering a coordinated approach at the regional and global levels among relevant United Nations entities, aiming at making further use of their analytical and normative capacity at the country level for policy advice and capacity-building activities. The regional commissions are also committed to ensuring that the transboundary and regional integration and cooperation issues are considered not only at the regional and subregional levels but also at the national and global levels.

2. The commissions kept under review, both at the intergovernmental and secretariat levels, the necessary follow-up actions needed for implementation of the Outcome of the 2005 World Summit and the subsequent initiatives taken by the General Assembly on the review of mandates, reform of the Economic and Social Council and its enhanced role and establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission.

1. Reforms and programmatic adjustments

3. Member States of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) successfully concluded a reform process, undertaken on the basis of an external evaluation report, culminating in the adoption by the Commission of a resolution at its sixty-first session, held in February 2006, as submitted for approval by the Council (to be issued as E/2006/15/Add.1). The reform led to a substantial streamlining of the overall governance structure of ECE; a strengthening of accountability and transparency in order to ensure the coherence and cost-effectiveness of the activities of the Commission; a major restructuring of the programme of work, guided by the priorities agreed upon by the ECE member States and reflected in substantial programme shifts; and the fostering of coordination and cooperation of ECE with other organizations (both within and outside the United Nations) active in the region in order to maximize synergies and avoid duplication, thereby ensuring an effective complementarity of work.

4. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) launched an external evaluation and is due to undertake a major review of its structures in 2007. The Commission fostered an arrangement to discuss regional cooperation issues with other regional cooperation/integration groupings

(Association of Southeast Asian Nations, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, Pacific Islands Forum and Economic Cooperation Organization) at an annual meeting at the executive level, hosted on a rotational basis by those organizations and ESCAP. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) is currently undertaking intensive consultations with its member States as well as the secretariats of the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development, aimed at reorienting itself and refocusing its priorities. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has also discussed the 2005 World Summit Outcome and its implementation by the Commission with a view to serving its member States more effectively and to promoting greater regional complementarity and coherence. The executive secretaries reported to the Secretary-General that the commissions, while preparing the programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007, had significantly streamlined their programme structures and had undertaken a detailed review of mandates, which had resulted in the discontinuation of a significant number of outputs for each commission associated with low priority and obsolete mandates.

2. Review of mandates in the context of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs

5. In compliance with the 2005 World Summit Outcome, the executive secretaries guided the coordinated efforts of the regional commissions, in consultation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and other members of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, to assess all mandates older than five years originating from the resolutions of the General Assembly and its subsidiary organs.

6. The post-Summit review of mandates resulted in further streamlining, aimed at bringing about more coherence among the main entities on the Executive Committee, including the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNCTAD and the regional commissions. The executive secretaries noted that areas in which the global and regional linkage of mandates should be strengthened included tourism, trade and investment, information and communication technology and population and migration.

7. In line with the current inter-agency coordination mechanism mandated by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1998/46, the regional commissions can further strengthen cooperation at the regional level, using the Millennium Development Goals as an entry point and involving other relevant regional organizations in that process. The result of those arrangements can feed into the Council's annual ministerial review as part of the regional perspective. The regional commissions and the members of the Executive Committee of the United Nations Development Group, in particular the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), can also align themselves better through the Development Group, together with its observers, at the regional level, following the successful example of ECLAC and the Latin American bureaux of the Executive Committee members. In particular, the executive secretaries recognized the urgent need to mutually strengthen cooperation with UNDP regional bureaux, including the regional/subregional offices, with a view to improving the coherence and complementarity of services being delivered. Accordingly, they initiated discussions

with the Administrator and agreed to pursue the latter's suggestion of a joint exercise to map expertise in the regional commissions.

8. The executive secretaries welcomed the initiative of the Secretary-General to strengthen system-wide coherence, aimed at more streamlined and cost-effective delivery of services to the developing countries, including the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, and countries with economies in transition. System-wide coherence is all the more necessary at the regional level in view of the decentralization carried out by several partner organizations in recent years to strengthen their regional presence in support of country development processes.

9. The executive secretaries believe that, in addition to their role as neutral and universal forums, one of the main comparative advantages of the regional commissions resides in their analytical capabilities to provide alternative views and policy perspectives on regional, subregional and interregional issues of development concern to the member States. In that regard, they fill significant gaps in analysis and services that other United Nations system organizations and regional bodies do not provide, such as enabling comparability between national and regional statistics, facilitating linkages between macroeconomic policies and social cohesion and harmonizing trade policy initiatives between global and regional integration processes. In cooperation with the relevant regional and United Nations system organizations, they assist in building the capacity of developing countries to adjust to the complexities of the development processes that have an impact on their development. The commissions also utilize their convening power as the regional arm of the United Nations to build further collaboration with other regional and subregional organizations, including the development banks.

10. The executive secretaries remained engaged in the United Nations reform process. They noted that follow-up resolutions by the General Assembly had direct implications for the work of the commissions. In that regard, they stressed the need for more effective coordination among the members of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, in particular, with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UNCTAD. They also noted the interlinkages that exist between development, peace, security and human rights. They attached particular importance to having the regional perspectives adequately reflected in the newly established annual ministerial review mechanisms and in the holding of the Development Cooperation Forum by the Council. The executive secretaries recalled the dynamic role being played by different regions as engines of growth of the global economy and as the source of growing intraregional trade, investment and technology. The dynamism in the regions also has a significant bearing on strengthening South-South cooperation, which is an area of particular interest to the regional commissions, including for arrangements for triangular cooperation.

11. The executive secretaries welcomed the contributions of the regional commissions to the World Summit on the Information Society, including through organization of regional preparatory meetings and events in which Governments and various other stakeholders participated. They welcomed the reflection of the regional dimension and the role of the regional commissions in the Tunis Commitment and the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society. Noting that all the commissions, recognizing the critical role of information and communication technology in development, had established the necessary programme,

intergovernmental and secretariat support structures for promoting information and communication technology for development, they expressed their intention to effectively pursue the necessary follow-up. In addition to the several areas clearly identified by the Summit, the executive secretaries noted that discussions on regional follow-up had emphasized capacity-building, the power of the regional commissions to convene meetings and conferences, the exchange of experiences and good practices and information society measurement, benchmarking and monitoring. They also agreed to pursue the promotion of interregional cooperation and exchange of experiences among the commissions in the follow-up process, inter alia, through undertaking projects under the United Nations Development Account. In that regard, the executive secretaries agreed to pursue cooperation with the Digital Solidarity Fund, endorsed by the Summit participants as a voluntary commitment of stakeholders. Some of the commissions established arrangements with the Fund for cooperation through the exchange of memorandums of understanding. The executive secretaries noted that to ensure support for countries in their efforts to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, the commissions were promoting the use of information and communication technologies, including remote-sensing technology, with special emphasis on the needs of the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

12. The executive secretaries exchanged views on the problem of unemployment in their regions, taking into account the recent analyses by their commissions. They also held two interregional seminars on the recent macroeconomic situation and development challenges and on infrastructure development in the regions on the sidelines of their meeting, hosted by ESCAP in Bangkok on 20 and 21 April. The executive secretaries emphasized the role of regional cooperation in enhancing infrastructure development in their respective regions. Based on their commissions' analyses of the varying infrastructural needs and financing gaps, the executive secretaries exchanged views on the multiple sources of financing available in their regions to meet those needs, including public-private partnerships. They believed that modalities for innovative resource generation for financing infrastructure development should be explored.

13. Given the growing need for a coordinated approach on a variety of issues, and noting the increasing need for programme effectiveness and cooperation among the regional commissions, the executive secretaries decided to organize meetings of the chiefs of programme planning, as a subsidiary structure to their meeting, which would report to them through the Regional Commissions New York Office. The terms of reference for and objectives of the meetings of the chiefs include: support in strengthening interregional cooperation and cooperation among the regional commissions; ensuring more coherence in programme planning and results-based budgeting, promoting the exchange of information, knowledge and good practices in the areas of programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation; enhancing coordination of operational activities at the regional level and strengthening linkages between the global and national levels.

14. On the sidelines of the meeting of the executive secretaries the executive secretaries of ECE and ESCAP discussed the progress achieved in the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia. The Special Programme was launched at the initiative of the Secretary-General in 1998 by ESCAP and ECE to respond to the specific technical assistance needs of Central Asian economies in transition. The programme originally covered Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan,

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and subsequently was extended to include Azerbaijan. Afghanistan has recently joined the programme. It seeks to promote regional cooperation among the participating countries as well as their integration into the economies of Asia and Europe.

15. The past year witnessed important developments in revitalizing the Special Programme, both institutionally and programmatically. Programme elements now include cooperation in the areas of trade, statistical capacity-building, information and communication technologies for development, gender and the economy, transport and efficient use of energy and water resources. The newly constituted Governing Council, the apex body for giving policy guidance and overseeing impleme ntion of the workplan of the Programme, is composed of the national coordinators of participating countries. The Council will meet for its inaugural session in June 2006 in Baku. In conjunction with the Council session, the Economic Forum of the Programme will also hold its first meeting and will address the theme of the energy dividend. The Forum provides for multi-stakeholder dialogue on current issues of vital interest to the region.

B. Implementation of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals

16. After the 2005 World Summit, in cooperation with the relevant partners of the United Nations system and regional organizations, the commissions published regional reviews on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. ECE published its first regional report on the Goals, entitled "The Millennium Development Goals: the way ahead — a pan-European perspective" in February 2006, just prior to the sixty-first session of the Commission. ESCAP, in collaboration with UNDP and the Asian Development Bank, is preparing the third regional report on the Goals for Asia and the Pacific, scheduled to be issued in 2007. ESCAP also undertook a major study on infrastructure development, the theme of its sixty-second session, held in Jakarta in April 2006. ECLAC and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization prepared jointly a report entitled "Investing better in order to invest more: finance and management of education in Latin America and the Caribbean", which examines outstanding challenges. In conjunction with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and other agencies, ECLAC has coordinated the preparation of a series of studies on gender and the Millennium Development Goals. To date, 12 country studies have been prepared, of which eight have been published. In 2006, a regional project is being prepared on gender and ethnicity in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as an inter-agency study on violence against women as an input to the report by the Secretary-General. The thirty-ninth ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, hosted by Burkina Faso in May 2006, addressed the theme "Meeting the challenge of employment and poverty in Africa", for which a major study was undertaken. Likewise, in addition to the inter-agency report on regional implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, published a few months ago, ESCWA addressed two major issues as the theme for the Commission's session: facing the youth unemployment problem and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in the ESCWA region. Indeed, since the 2005 World Summit, the commissions' work focused on supporting the efforts of their members to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and other

development goals identified at global United Nations conferences and summits. This was reflected in the strategic frameworks for 2006-2007 and 2008-2009.

17. The analyses by the commissions revealed that overall progress in the achievement of the Goals, in particular in reducing poverty, was uneven within and across regions and even within countries. They also affirmed that in the absence of tangible action to accelerate progress, with particular emphasis on sub-Saharan Africa, the achievement of the Goals would be at stake in several regions. While there are many instances of people moving out of poverty, some countries were particularly successful in taking advantage of their relative rapid growth to effectively address poverty and other Goals. An interesting example is Viet Nam, which reduced poverty from 51 per cent in 1990 to 14 per cent in 2002. The incidence of poverty in the transition economies of ECE, including the Central Asian countries, increased drastically in the 1990s, but has been declining since 2001. In Western Asia, poverty in conflict-stricken countries severely deteriorated. Palestine experienced a dramatic increase in poverty after 2000. In Iraq, while there is no reliable data covering the past few years, there is no doubt that poverty worsened as a result of the ongoing conflict. Even though traditionally poverty is viewed as a rural phenomenon, there is an increasing trend towards growing urban poverty in all regions, which presents new challenges for development. Among the developing regions, only in Latin America and the Caribbean has hunger declined enough to reach the related target, owing to sustained efforts to address the issue. However, even there, a few countries face increasing malnourishment, underscoring the need for continued vigilance. The poverty rate is highest in sub-Saharan Africa, where the HIV/AIDS pandemic is also reducing life expectancy, lowering household incomes, straining national health budgets and health systems and further pushing households into poverty. There, the number of underweight children and hungry people and the maternal mortality rate have increased significantly in the last decade. All five regions are close to achieving universal enrolment in primary education, though achieving the goal will require additional efforts in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and the Pacific island countries, where coverage rates also remain a challenge. In most developing regions, gender disparities become apparent when girls enter secondary school. Economic inequality, which is increasing within and among countries in most regions, with Latin America being the most unequal region in the world, is also becoming a matter of major concern.

1. Sustainable development

18. The regional commissions make possible the integration of the three pillars of sustainable development through their cross-sectoral approaches to environmental challenges and regional follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The regional forums include ministerial conferences and regional implementation meetings to support the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development. In preparation for the fourteenth session of the Commission, each of the regional commissions organized implementation meetings in cooperation with other relevant institutional partners, which assessed the progress made in the region in implementing sustainable development in the areas of energy for sustainable development, atmosphere, climate change and industrial development. The review involved inputs from member States, regional and subregional intergovernmental organizations, civil society and the private sector.

19. The regional implementation meetings also considered interlinkages between those themes, cross-cutting issues relating to them and the role of the commissions in the context of regional implementation of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation for sustainable development. In those meetings, countries agreed that more attention should be given to the development, implementation and transfer of cleaner technologies and an expansion of alternative sources of energy.

20. The regional implementation meetings reaffirmed that poverty eradication is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development and reiterated the commitment of countries to the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, including paying special attention to small island developing States, least developed countries and heavily indebted poor countries. The meetings affirmed that the achievement of the development goals depends upon an enabling international environment premised on the development priorities of developing countries and countries in transition that addresses the challenges of financing for development, globalization and market access in the export sectors of interest to them. The meetings also underlined that success in achieving the objectives of development and poverty eradication require good governance within each country and at the international level, as well as transparency in financial, monetary and trading systems.

21. In addition, the regional commissions continued their work to promote environmental norms and conventions and are providing technical assistance through regional advisory services, capacity-building workshops and projects to assist countries in their regions. For example, the ECE environmental performance reviews assist countries in transition to improve their management of the environment, making concrete recommendations for better policy implementation and performance while contributing to sustainable development. The reviews aim at assessing a country's efforts to reduce its overall pollution burden and manage its natural resources, integrating environmental and socio-economic policies, and at strengthening cooperation with the international community. The second round of reviews is currently under way.

2. Gender

22. On the follow-up and regional implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the commissions continued to give particular attention to issues such as the impact of globalization on women, gender-based violence, systemic institutional inequalities that impede women's equal participation and gender mainstreaming at all levels. The commissions monitor and facilitate policy formulation, awareness-raising and outreach throughout their respective regions. On the empowerment issue, the commissions are promoting networks, women's entrepreneurship and improvement of access to information and communication technologies.

23. In early 2006, ECE launched a gender database and also provided technical support to countries in transition in the area of gender statistics. The African Centre for Gender and Development of ECA developed the African Gender and Development Index, a tool for profiling gender equality. The Mexico Consensus, adopted at the Ninth Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, served as the basis of the work by ECLAC and the Governments of the region. The ESCWA Centre for Women continued to focus on three main areas of women's empowerment: economic (poverty alleviation), social (gender roles and partnership in the family) and political (sharing in decision-making and political

participation). The Centre concentrated on providing substantive support to member States in formulating action-oriented measures and gender-sensitive legislation and compiling country profiles, policies and strategies. ESCWA also hosted the Arab regional follow-up to the International Year of the Family. ESCAP promotes women's empowerment and advancement by overcoming barriers to gender equality while reducing poverty. Both ECA and ESCAP pay particular attention to the issue of HIV/AIDS among women and the trafficking of women and girls. In 2005, ECE and ESCAP established a working group on gender and economy as part of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia.

3. Population and migration

24. In addition to continuing International Conference on Population and Development follow-up activities, the regional commissions facilitated policy dialogues among their member States on issues of priority interest related to population. ECE focused on the various facets of demographic change in Europe and North America and has developed a network of national focal points on ageing. Based on the information collected and exchanged in the network, the ECE secretariat plans to compile a regional overview of the Madrid International Action Plan on Ageing follow-up. Regarding the use of population censuses, ECLAC focused on evaluating the 2005 census round and started looking to the 2010 round. ECA focused on policy analysis and advocacy and supported the Commission for HIV/AIDS and Governance in Africa, which it hosted, with population data and analysis. ESCWA adopted a multifaceted strategy on increasing involvement with regional demographic centres, national population councils and concerned ministries.

25. The regional commissions took particular interest in the multidimensional aspect of international migration and in assisting countries in policy analysis. ESCWA will publish its third population and development report on youth unemployment and international migration in the Arab region. At its 2006 session, ESCAP highlighted the impact of cross-border migration on source and destination countries, the particular concerns of women migrants and migration policies and laws in source and destination countries. The ECLAC session held in March 2006 addressed the challenges and opportunities for development due to migration, from the perspective of the human rights of migrants and their families. ECA is preparing a publication on the implications for Africa of international migration and development.

C. Operational activities for development

26. In response to General Assembly resolution 59/250 on the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, the commissions pursued their efforts to strengthen and institutionalize some of the measures and mechanisms through which they are involved in country-level activities. At the global level, the commissions have been actively working through the UNDG working group on non-resident agencies and the UNDG programme group for the endorsement of such measures and the development of a workplan for their implementation. The commissions have also actively contributed to the UNDG 2006-2008 action plan in follow-up to the 2005 World Summit, emphasizing collaboration at the regional level in support of

country-level development work. Some of the mechanisms used by the regional commissions to participate in country work and actively interact with country offices and teams are set out below.

1. Participation in United Nations country team processes and frameworks (common country assessments and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework) and other analytical work

27. While the work of the regional commissions at the national level focuses on cross-border and regional issues, at the request of United Nations country teams and national Governments, the commissions are providing support to common country assessments and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and/or poverty reduction strategy paper processes. Some of the most common contributions the commissions provide to the common country assessments and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework processes are: conceptual frameworks on social, economic and sustainable development issues; comparative studies for policy decision-making, implementation and evaluation; expertise on cross-sectoral and development issues requiring a regional and/or subregional approach, including best practices; and country-based information on economic, social (including disaggregated information based on censuses) and environmental indicators.

2. Technical assistance, including through regional advisory services

28. The commissions provide technical assistance to member States in the form of policy advice, advocacy and training workshops at the country level to build capacity in key areas of development that are aligned with national priorities (as reflected in national development strategies (for example, poverty reduction strategies) and international commitments such as the Millennium Development Goals and internationally agreed norms, standards and legal instruments).

3. Regional coordination meetings and other regional inter-agency initiatives

29. Coordination meetings and knowledge-sharing forums at the regional level are important mechanisms through which the regional commissions can also bring to bear their capacities and expertise at the country level. Regional consultation meetings are being used, for example, by ESCAP, ECLAC and ESCWA to promote coordination in the activities and priorities of regional United Nations entities. This should assist United Nations country teams in improving the linkages of United Nations regional development activities to the national level.

30. A mechanism that proved effective in facilitating systematic knowledge sharing on poverty reduction among African countries and consequently leveraging United Nations country-level work is the African Learning Group on Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, established in 2001 by the Economic Commission for Africa, and its knowledge-sharing project. Building on the foundation of the Learning Group and to strengthen the link between poverty reduction strategies and the Millennium Development Goals, ECA designed a project entitled "Enhancing knowledge-sharing to support the poverty reduction process in Africa". In addition, the websites of the regional commissions have links to information on the regional activities of the United Nations system in given areas, including those related to poverty reduction.

31. Regional inter-agency initiatives involving United Nations and other organizations also enabled the regional commissions to contribute to country development work. Regional Millennium Development Goals reports, published by the commissions through inter-agency collaboration, are worthy of mention in this regard. Another example is the process recently initiated by ECE with the involvement of ESCAP, UNDP, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Economics Education and Research Consortium, which resulted in an agreement to establish a partnership for economics education and research support, aimed at integrating the existing networks and initiatives supporting economic research in Central Asia and improving links between policymakers and researchers.

D. Developments in selected areas of interregional cooperation among the commissions

32. The regional commissions continued to extend their cooperation among themselves and with other development partners, particularly through United Nations Development Account projects, which proved to be an effective vehicle in fostering interregional cooperation.

33. The regional commissions are involved in a new United Nations Development Account project on knowledge networks through information and communication technology access points for disadvantaged communities to achieve the targets set out in the Plan of Action adopted at the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society. It aims to strengthen the capacity of poor and disadvantaged communities, women in particular, to access business and agricultural information services and relevant local knowledge through a network of information and communication technology access points. The commissions are working closely with private Internet and network operators in the host countries to determine the sustainability, costs and optimal modes of operation (public, private or mixed) of information and communication technology-based networks for rural communities.

34. In support of developing countries' efforts to develop their capacity to address complex and multifaceted trade and environment issues comprehensively and to participate effectively in international negotiations, the regional commissions are working jointly, in collaboration with UNEP, UNCTAD and the World Trade Organization, on a project for capacity-building in trade and environment. Planning and preparation are complete and implementation is imminent.

35. As part of their operational support to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, the commissions are also involved in a project to strengthen social inclusion, gender equality and health promotion in the Millennium Development Goals process. The project is to be implemented over three years starting in 2006 and will focus on increasing the capacity of senior Government officials in the five regions to promote the social inclusion of vulnerable groups, gender equality and health dimensions in national development plans.

36. Finally, the commissions are working jointly, in partnership with the International Labour Organization, UNIFEM, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and non-governmental organizations on a project on the measurement of the informal sector and informal employment. The project aims to improve data on those sectors for the promotion of evidenced-based social policies at the national

and interregional levels. This is particularly important, as the informal sector represents a fundamental component of the economic structure of many developing countries and countries in transition, as demonstrated in section II below.

II. Regional dimension of creating an environment conducive to generating full and productive employment and decent work for all and its impact on sustainable development

A. Introduction

37. The emphasis given in the 2005 Summit Outcome to productive and decent employment is a clear acknowledgement of its importance to achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration. The present section of the report, providing perspectives in five areas, draws on recent analytical works of the regional commissions on selected employment-related problematiques.[1]

B. Inclusive growth, employment and poverty reduction

38. Inclusive growth means the participation of all in the tangible benefits of economic growth, made possible mainly by job creation and labour income or access to productive assets. In most regions, the first years of the present decade have not been favourable in that sense.

39. In Africa, the quality of many existing and new jobs and their wages did not alleviate poverty. This is reflected, among other things, in the growing number of working poor, accounting for almost 45 per cent of the total number of people employed in sub-Saharan Africa, increased part-time jobs in the formal sector, the growth of informal sector employment and high unemployment in the urban and rural economies, where underemployment is also a serious problem. From 1994 to 2000, informal employment accounted for 72 and 48 per cent of non-agricultural employment in sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa respectively. The inability to generate vitality in the rural economy is accelerating the rate of migration to African urban centres, aggravating the intensity and spread of urban poverty, where cities do not have the infrastructure and capacity for service delivery to support large population influxes.

40. Several factors account for the exclusion of the bulk of the population from formal employment: slow growth of the formal sector, limited market endowments and institutional barriers. Most workers in Africa are still engaged in the agricultural sector, characterized by seasonal underemployment. Many in rural areas work fewer

[1] See, for example: *Economic Report on Africa 2005: Meeting the Challenges of Unemployment and Poverty in Africa* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.05.II.K.9); *Economic Survey of Europe 2005* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.05.II.E.17); *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.06.II.F.10); Chapter III; *Preliminary overview of the economies of Latin America and the Caribbean 2005* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.05.II.G.188); and *Facing youth unemployment problems in the ESCWA region* (E/ESCWA/24/4/Part II).

hours than they would like, earn less than their counterparts in manufacturing and services, use their skills less and are generally less productive.

41. The Asian and Pacific region, despite the significant progress achieved over time in terms of economic growth and poverty reduction, remains a region of disparities, with around 680 million poor people. This reflects the lack of productive and decent employment opportunities. Indeed, many of those employed in the region earn paltry wages. The working poor, measured in terms of employees earning less than $2 a day (defined in terms of purchasing power parity), as a share of total employment in 2003 was as high as 88 per cent in South Asia, 59 per cent in South-East Asia and 49 per cent in East Asia. The likelihood that the working poor could fall prey to internal or external shocks and slide into extreme poverty is thus very high.

42. Inadequate growth is also an important issue in many smaller economies, including the Pacific island States. In those economies, national efforts can be severely undermined by the paucity of financial and non-financial resources and further eroded by physical remoteness. Without regional and, indeed, international aid and support, such as the global compact envisioned in the eighth Millennium Development Goal, the prospects for sustained long-term growth and, hence, for reducing poverty, in these countries are very limited.

43. In Latin America and the Caribbean, during the 1990s and the first years of the present decade, most new jobs were created in the informal sector — characterized by low average income — as unemployment soared, rising from 7.5 per cent in 1990 to 11.0 per cent in 2002/2003 (weighted average of 23 countries). In the first years of the present decade, an estimated 30 per cent of urban and 51 per cent of rural workers were poor. Weak productivity growth impeded significant increases in real wages. The weak evolution of the labour markets was reflected in high levels of emigration, especially from Mexico, Central America and some Andean countries.

44. In the ECE region, economies have relatively solid macroeconomic fundamentals but national performance in terms of establishing an inclusive growth pattern is mixed. In a number of countries, especially in South-Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, economic growth is accompanied by persistent poverty, unemployment and rising inequalities, not only in income, but also in access to basic services.

45. Owing to demographic pressure and the increasing rate of women entering the labour force, the ESCWA region has one of the highest rates of new entrants into the labour market. This is aggravating the already high unemployment rate in the region estimated at about 12 per cent in 2003. Unemployment is coupled with high underemployment, resulting in increasing poverty. Unemployment is also a result of the mismatch between skills availability and market demand. In the more diversified economies of the region, unemployment rates are expected to remain high because of slow job creation, low per capita growth and a reduction in the absorption of surplus labour by the Gulf Cooperation Council countries owing to "work-nationalization" policies and the increasing resort to lower-cost Asian labour. In the Council countries, the rise in the unemployment rate is a result of the capital-intensive oil sector and its weak linkages with the other sectors of the economy, the saturation of employment opportunities in the public sector and a weak private sector. Rapid and diversified growth is needed to provide opportunities for employment in both the formal and informal sectors and to generate resources for

the creation of public goods and infrastructure. In this context, issues of non-income poverty, such as insufficient or poor-quality public goods, namely education, health, transport and housing, can be meaningfully addressed.

46. Remittances sent by migrants and temporary workers on contract abroad to their families have greatly helped to raise the standard of living of some of the poorest sections of society in South Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific. This is also true for many other countries in the ECLAC, ECA and ESCWA regions as well as countries with economies in transition. In this regard, the experience of the Philippines in channelling remittances more to productive sectors is worth noting. Immigration can also promote trade and foreign investment and thus greater employment. Immigrants can return with enhanced job skills and knowledge and thus act as a mechanism for transferring technical know-how.

C. Employment challenges for youth and women

1. Youth employment

47. In all regions, developing countries face evolving challenges in successfully integrating youth into their workforces. These include demographic shifts that are altering the relative size of cohorts entering the labour market, a transformation in agricultural productivity that frees labour from the countryside to work in the urban areas and global trade that may alter the relative demand for labour across sectors. More young women are entering the labour market, even in countries where women have traditionally not worked outside the home. Less experience, inadequate education and an over-regulated labour market put youth at a disadvantage even when higher economic growth translates into overall increased employment opportunities. During periods of economic upturn, youth are the last to be hired, and in economic downturns they are first to be fired. Everywhere, youth are more likely than adults to be unemployed, but the ratio of unemployed youth to adults varies significantly across regions.

48. Youth in sub-Saharan Africa are 3.5 times more likely to be unemployed than adults. In North Africa, the unemployment rate for youth aged 15 to 24 was twice that of the overall labour force in 2003. In sub-Saharan Africa, unemployed youth as a share of the total unemployed was 63 per cent, even though youth made up only 33 per cent of the labour force. These much higher unemployment rates for youth hold for both genders.

49. Similarly, at 21 per cent, the unemployment rate among Arab youth in 2004 was more than double that of adults. Although youth comprise only approximately 24 per cent of the region's labour force, they make up nearly 44 per cent of the total unemployed in the region. Overall, youth in the Arab countries are 2.5 times more likely than adults to be unemployed. Young females experience even higher unemployment rates than those of young males.

50. In the Asian and Pacific region, unemployment is also highly concentrated among youth. For example, while the overall unemployment rate in the region was about 4.4 per cent in 2004, the rate of youth unemployment varied between 7.5 per cent in East Asia and 17.1 per cent in South-East Asia. The number of unemployed more than doubled in South-East Asia, from just under 5 million in

1994 to nearly 10.5 million in 2004. South Asia has the largest number of unemployed youth, at almost 14.5 million in 2004.

51. In 2004, in the 25-member European Union (EU) the unemployment rate for youth between 15 and 24 years of age stood at 18.7 per cent against a national average of 9 per cent, while in the transition countries in South-East Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, youth unemployment rates were also higher than the national averages. Furthermore, unlike in Western Europe, many non-EU countries, especially in Central Asia, face enormous pressure on labour markets due to their "young" demographic structure.

52. As in other regions, youth in Latin America and the Caribbean region confront special problems for a productive integration into the labour markets, as is illustrated by the higher unemployment rates for this group. For instance, in 2003, as a simple average for 18 Latin American countries, urban unemployment stood at 11.4 per cent, while the rate was 21.3 per cent for young people (15 to 24 years of age).

2. Women's employment

53. The participation of women in the labour force continues to grow in all the regions. The expansion of manufacturing, particularly growth in textile exports to the developed countries, made a significant contribution in various regions by creating employment opportunities for women. This highlights, in many ways, the need for favourable trade regimes to open markets for developing countries. The positive developments in women's employment also underscore the need for a greater focus on providing decent and productive employment opportunities for these new prospective workers.

54. Despite the gains in employment, women workers still face substantial challenges in all the regions. In sub-Saharan Africa, the official unemployment rate is lower for women than for men among both adults and youth, although more so for youth. The effective unemployment rate for women is likely to be higher than indicated by official statistics in Africa (and, perhaps, in some of the other regions). The rate may be underestimated for several reasons: given social norms, women are disproportionately involved in unpaid work at home and are not counted as unemployed. Women are also less likely to find jobs in an environment of high unemployment so they drop out of the formal market and, perhaps, resort to the informal sector. The official unemployment rates mask the fact that female workers are mostly in informal employment in Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa 84 per cent of female non-agricultural workers are in the informal sector, compared with 63 per cent of males. In addition, most female informal sector workers are in self-employment rather than wage employment.

55. Despite its rise, the economic activity rate of women in the Arab region, which was approximately 29 per cent in 2000, is one of the lowest in the world. This can be attributed to a combination of factors, including sluggish economic growth in the two preceding decades, the poor absorptive capacity of the labour market, legal frameworks and social and cultural norms. In general, the economic activity rate of women is higher in the Arab least developed countries, where agriculture is an important sector and a large seasonal employer of women. A higher economic activity rate may not necessarily indicate a greater degree of economic empowerment, as it may also point to greater poverty and the need for additional

income. The lowest women's economic activity rates prevail in the high-income oil-exporting countries. However, in Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates more than one third of women over age 15 were economically active in the period from 1995 to 2002. This relatively high rate may be attributed to the large presence of female migrant workers in those countries.

56. In the ECE region, women's employment opportunities vary substantially by country. While the level of women's employment continued to improve in most countries in North America and Western Europe as a result of better legislative frameworks, opposite trends were seen in most countries with transition economies. In southern Europe and in the Commonwealth of Independent States, women's position on the labour market deteriorated owing to disproportional cuts in women's employment in the mid-1990s, discriminatory practices, especially in the private sector, and the rise of traditional views on women's role in society. The quality of women's employment is also a problem across the ECE region. Women's jobs are usually clustered at the lower end of the labour market, which is reflected in the persistence of a pay gap. On average women in the European Union earn 15 per cent less than men. The pay gap is much larger elsewhere, such as in Central Asia, where women's average wages are as low as 40 per cent of men's wages in Tajikistan and 60 per cent in Kazakhstan. Also, part-time jobs, which are less secure and usually offer inadequate social benefits, are highly feminized across the ECE region.

57. Although the participation of women in the labour market has increased over the last decade, as in other regions women in Latin America and the Caribbean confront special problems. On the one hand the trend has been marked by a concentration of women workers in precarious, poorly paid jobs in low-productivity sectors. On the other hand, while progress has been achieved in narrowing the labour-income gap between men and women, it has been uneven for different categories of workers, grouped by educational level. Paradoxically, the widest gap is found among the most highly educated women, whose wage income in 2002 was only 66.2 per cent of that of men.

D. Economic growth and job creation: challenges of jobless growth?

58. Several factors have weakened the relationship between output growth and labour market performance in most of the regions. First, the pace of job creation has not kept up with the growth in the labour force (owing to several factors in most developing regions: high birth rates, increasing female participation rates and extended working ages). Second, employment fluctuations have only been weakly pro-cyclical. Third, economic expansion in many countries has taken place in sectors that are not labour intensive (such as in the predominant energy sector in the ESCWA region and in the commodity-exporting economies of the Commonwealth of Independent States). Expansions driven by capital-intensive extractive industries or highly technological export economies do not generate corresponding growth in total employment and/or a reduction in unemployment. Fourth, there has been lower demand for labour as a result of technological change and the considerable downsizing that has occurred in public sector employment following privatization. Geographic and sectoral labour mobility is still low in many of the economies of these regions, effectively preventing labour movement from the declining to the expanding sectors or regions. Finally, labour markets are relatively more responsive to growth in gross domestic product in countries that have made more progress in

market reforms. The existing labour market rigidities (such as entry/re-entry barriers and skill mismatches) contribute to prolonging the average duration of unemployment. Removing or reducing these rigidities would contribute to increasing responsiveness of employment to output growth.

59. Although high growth rates are often the best pro-employment policy, the traditional nexus between economic growth and job creation appears to have been challenged over the last few years in most regions.

60. Africa, for instance, recorded 4.6 per cent growth in 2004, the highest in almost a decade and a continuing improvement over both 2002 and 2003. While macroeconomic performance has markedly improved in Africa since the mid-1990s, there seems to be little impact on unemployment. Despite the fact that average annual growth in gross domestic product increased steadily from less than 3 per cent in 1998 to 4.6 per cent in 2004, unemployment has hovered around 10 per cent since 1995, higher than in most other developing regions, with marked differences by subregion, country, gender and age group.

61. Another stark example is in the Asian and Pacific region. While the region had the highest average annual growth rate of 5.7 per cent over the last 15 years against the world average of 3.4 per cent, the employment growth rate has been a mere 1.8 per cent. Underemployment, particularly in rural areas, is more widespread than unemployment itself. The Asian and Pacific region also harbours an estimated 127 million, or 52 per cent, of the world's 246 million working children between the ages of 5 and 14. There is now widespread concern that many countries in the region are achieving high output growth at the expense of employment creation. Jobless growth is occurring particularly in rapidly growing economies where the rate of unemployment has tended recently to rise.

62. In the ESCWA region, despite an 11 per cent growth in income over the last two years, there was only a 1 per cent reduction in the rate of unemployment. Economic growth in the region, mainly in the capital-intensive oil sector, has failed to translate into new and better jobs that would also lead to a reduction in poverty. The region has not been able to create a suitable environment for the development of a strong manufacturing sector and small and medium-sized enterprises, which have proved to be major absorbers of labour. Employment creation has been concentrated mainly in the informal sector, where social security and other social benefits are absent, leading to greater inequality.

63. Similarly, economic activity in the eight new EU member States from Central and Eastern Europe picked up noticeably in 2004. Their aggregate gross domestic product grew by some 5 per cent. All Baltic economies continued to grow at a brisk pace. In South-Eastern Europe aggregate gross domestic product rose by some 8 per cent. However, despite such an acceleration of output growth, net job creation was rather weak in that part of the ECE region and unemployment rates remained stagnant or declined slightly. Similarly, while the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia recorded an average gross domestic product growth rate of more than 8 per cent, they experienced only a modest reduction in their unemployment rates.

64. On the other hand, and distinct from other regions, in Latin America and the Caribbean, in general terms the relationship between economic growth and job creation continues to be valid. While between 1998 and 2003 low and volatile

growth was the main cause for the sluggish creation of productive jobs, there was a positive evolution of the labour markets during the recent higher growth years. In 2004, gross domestic product growth in the economies of Latin America and the Caribbean stood at 5.9 per cent and per capita gross domestic product growth was 4.4 per cent. The recovery had a positive impact on labour markets: urban unemployment fell from 10.7 per cent in 2003 to 10.0 per cent in 2004, although labour supply continued to trend upwards. Unemployment began to decrease and reached 9.3 per cent in 2005. At the same time, the worrying trend towards informal employment and the casualization of labour is continuing in the region.

E. Employment and conflict prevention

65. Among the primary economic causes of conflict in parts of Africa, as in other regions, are low incomes or outright poverty, inequalities between and within States, weak or non-existent State institutions and a lack of participatory democracy. In addition, high unemployment, bleak prospects for improvement in standards of living and a lack of equal opportunity for all ethnic groups are reasons for social strife. Severe economic and social costs are particularly associated with youth unemployment. With limited options, unemployed youth are more likely to engage in criminal behaviour, particularly armed robbery, as well as other high-risk and self-destructive behaviour, such as sex work and illicit drug use. A particularly troubling adverse consequence of youth unemployment is the recruitment of child combatants for armed conflict, which has harmed some African economies.

66. The ESCWA region continues to suffer from conflicts and their spillover effects. Instability and risks have caused a significant slowdown of regional investment and growth, resulting in rising unemployment, especially among youth. Worst hit are the conflict zones in Iraq and the occupied Palestinian territories, where unemployment rates reached about 30 and 50 per cent respectively, resulting in a substantial increase in poverty. The population living below the poverty line of $2 per day reached almost 62 per cent in the occupied Palestinian territories in 2005. Poverty rates in Iraq are estimated to have worsened since 1999, when almost one third of the population was already below the poverty line. Conflict and instability and high unemployment rates among youth provide fertile soil for social problems and for terrorism.

67. In Latin America and the Caribbean, employment problems rank high in surveys about the main problems perceived by the population. The perception that the economic system does not benefit everybody equally and, specifically, that economic growth does not create the jobs required by a growing population, frequently stands at the root of social unrest and of discontent with political institutions, weakening trust in democracy as an efficient and fair form of organization of society. Inequalities in access to education, training and jobs tend to deepen the corresponding potential for conflict.

68. In the Asian and Pacific region, social exclusion has been at the centre of many conflicts, owing to a lack of opportunities for decent employment and the resulting poverty. The frustration of unemployed youth leads to conflicts, civil unrest and a rising crime rate. Therefore, the provision of employment opportunities will not only reduce poverty but is also a key determinant of conflict prevention.

69. In the ECE region, violent conflicts within States and intra-State conflicts have often taken the form of intermittent warfare. Intra-State conflict is typically caused by political and economic legacies of the cold war, illegitimate governmental institutions, problematic regional relationships, poorly managed religious, cultural or ethnic differences and systematic economic deprivation. The absence of peace or the presence of dormant conflicts has clearly prevented some economies from achieving their full potential in terms of both economic growth and job creation. Job creation for youth is among top policy priorities in such countries, which otherwise risk the exclusion of large groups of youth from working society.

F. Social cohesion covenants as a comprehensive policy response for creating a conducive environment for full, productive and decent work for all

70. The issue of unemployment has to be considered in the context of the overall macroeconomic environment if a tangible and sustained reduction in employment is to be achieved, as labour market policies alone cannot generate employment. Sound macroeconomic policies, a sound macroeconomic environment and a strong development agenda are imperatives for the creation of adequate jobs.

71. As a consequence of the opening up of economies and accelerated technological change, firms face greater competitive pressure and increasing volatility in the markets. Furthermore, workers' job stability has come under increasing pressure.

72. To strengthen firms' resilience without sacrificing workers' basic rights and to include more workers in the productive process, there is a need for covenants of social cohesion, the fundamental elements of which would be a new institutional setting of the labour market, a new design for social protection systems, an integral set of active labour market policies and policies to include the informal sector, all based on responsible macroeconomic policies and policies for productive development.

73. The new economic global context requires a new institutional setting for the labour market, with a higher degree of adaptability and flexibility than the formal labour market, within certain limits and not at the expense of workers' basic social protection and with a social dialogue on different levels as the means to define its specific characteristics.

74. The transformation of labour markets requires reforms of social security systems, especially of aspects traditionally linked to the holding of a formal, stable job. Without such a new system the growing flexibility of the labour market will lead to the predominance of precarious jobs. That means the development of systems with a higher level of diversification and broader coverage and an adequate mix of individual contributions and systemic solidarity.

75. Responsible fiscal policies are a fundamental ingredient of such a covenant of social cohesion, as only they permit the development of efficient and sustainable systems of social protection and labour policies. ECLAC has already proposed such a covenant for its region. Many elements of the covenant could be adapted and applied in other regions.

G. Other policy responses for addressing employment challenges

76. In addition to a social cohesion covenant, or rather as part of it, a number of policy directions set out below need to be taken to address the major employment challenges outlined above.

1. Reducing labour market rigidities

77. In all regions more proactive labour market policies would be beneficial. Devoting more resources to training and retraining programmes and job search and job placement assistance, and possibly subsidizing employment, could help reduce existing labour market rigidities. Improvements in transportation and other infrastructures, the development of housing markets, technology transfer and international cooperation to liberalize cross-border labour movements would substantially stimulate labour mobility.

2. Promoting youth and women's employment

78. The productive integration of youth and women, especially from poor households, into the labour market is necessary for present and future growth prospects, social mobility and the interruption of the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Good education at all levels is key in this regard, in terms of both quality and equality of access. Policies in the area include, but are not limited to, preventing early school leaving, improving the quality of training for teachers and adapting curricula to bring them in line with labour market demand. Complementary programmes facilitating entry to the labour market and targeted to youth and women should be developed (for instance, information and communication technology training). Career guidance and counselling and the provision of market information would also be useful tools to steer them in the right direction. In other words, a comprehensive set of policy interventions to enhance the employability of youth and women should be a key component of active market policies and educational reforms.

3. Facilitating the creation of small and medium-sized enterprises

79. Given the limitations of labour demand for less-skilled persons, the strengthening of small and medium-sized enterprises and, especially, microenterprises is key in job creation, as these types of production units are not only labour intensive in general, but specifically relatively intensive in low-skilled labour. A central element would be the modernization of small and medium-sized enterprises, which have the potential to create many quality jobs. Important instruments are measures to improve access to information, credit, technology and trading systems. These policies should be complemented by actions to promote horizontal cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises, establishing links with larger firms, and to strengthen productive structures on a local level or in specific production chains. In many countries a number of measures of this type have been taken, but frequently they suffer from problems of efficiency and coordination. Finally, policies supporting the development of services that respond to local demand or enhance economy-wide productivity growth and competitiveness would also have a decisive impact on employment.

4. Valorizing the social role of the private sector

80. The private sector could also play a greater role in assisting States to enhance security and stability by exercising its social corporate responsibility including through key investments to help diffuse tensions (for example, investments to generate more youth employment and/or target vulnerable regions) and investing in training facilities for workers. Furthermore, while being a long-term goal in many countries, the formalization of informal enterprises is an important step for an inclusive strategy of job creation.

5. Reducing economic volatility

81. In recent years, both low and relatively high economic growth periods have reinforced the importance of high and stable economic growth rates and conducive economic policies, with countercyclical fiscal and monetary policies potentially playing a key role in this regard. The facilitation of mutual understanding of macroeconomic policies among the countries of the region may make an important contribution to the reduction of volatility. The regional commissions could play a useful role in supporting corresponding efforts on a regional and subregional level.

H. Conclusions

82. **Creating opportunities for regional cooperation in support of national employment strategies and policies can significantly contribute to the generation of productive employment and decent work for all. While all regions, to varying degrees, are confronted with the same broad employment challenges, the policy directions presented above need to be considered, fine-tuned and applied in the specific context of each of them. There is therefore a great potential benefit in exchanging experiences and best practices among the countries of a same region or subregion. In some cases, such exchange can even take place at the interregional level, for example in order to compare experiences in establishing region-wide systems of measurement of knowledge and competencies.**

83. **The regional commissions can play a greater analytical and advocacy role, in close cooperation with the other organizations active in these areas, in the various policy elements presented above, including within the framework of the proposed social cohesion covenants.**

84. **Along this line, regional training workshops could be organized in partnership with the International Labour Organization and other relevant international, regional, national, local and business organizations. These training workshops could gather countries with similar problems to build the capacity of public and private employment agencies and develop databases that would facilitate the placement of youth in jobs and their training for education-to-work transition. These activities could serve as a forum to exchange models, experiences and success stories and lead to practical guidance for formulating strategies and policies for youth employment. Other activities in support of infrastructure development, technology transfer and migration and the related remittances, all being of a transboundary nature with important effects on national employment generation efforts, would continue to be specifically supported by the regional commissions.**